

What i Claim d is:

1. A method for a value dispensing device to process usage data for an audit period comprising:

generating a first audit record at a start of the audit period, the first audit record including at least one register value at the start of the audit period and a first digital signature;

logging the usage data for the audit period; and

generating a second audit record at an end of the audit period, the second audit record including the at least one register value at the end of the audit period and a second digital signature.

2. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

providing the first audit record, the second audit record, and the usage data for the audit period to a data center.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein the first audit record and the second audit record further include a time stamp.

4. The method of claim 3, wherein the time stamp includes a date and a time.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein the at least one register value in the first and second audit records includes a plurality of register values.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein the at least one register value in the first and second audit records includes an ascending register value.

7. The method of claim 1, wherein the at least one register value in the first and second audit records includes a total piece count register value.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein the first and second digital signatures are generated utilizing a private key.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein generating a first audit record further comprises:

storing the first audit record in the value dispensing system.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein generating a first audit record further comprises:

providing the first audit record to a data center before the end of the audit period.

11. The method of claim 1, wherein the value dispensing system is a postage meter, and the usage data includes at least one of a total amount of postage dispensed during the audit period, a total count of mail pieces processed during the audit period, a piece count for different classes of mail processed during the audit period, and a piece count for each different postage amount dispensed during the audit period.

12. A method for a data center to process usage data comprising:

receiving a first audit record, a second audit record and the usage data, the first audit record including at least one register value at a start of the audit period and a first digital signature, the second audit record including the at least one register value at an end of the audit period and a second digital signature;

verifying the first and second digital signatures; and

if the first and second digital signatures verify, reconciling at least a portion of the usage data with the at least one register value included in the audit records.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein the first and second audit records each include a respective time stamp, and the method further comprises:

verifying the time stamp in the first audit record corresponds to the start of the audit period; and

verifying the time stamp in the second audit record corresponds to the end of the audit period.

14. The method of claim 13, wherein if one of the time stamp in the first audit record or the second audit record does not correspond, the method further comprises:

indicating an error in the processing of the usage data.

15. The method of claim 13, wherein the time stamp includes a date and a time.

16. The method of claim 12, wherein reconciling at least a portion of the usage data further comprises:

determining a difference between the at least one register value included in the second audit record and the at least one register value include in the first audit record; and

comparing the difference with a register value included in the usage data.

17. The method of claim 16, wherein if the at least a portion of the usage data does not reconcile, the method further comprises:

indicating an error in the processing of the usage data.

18. The method according to claim 12, wherein the first audit record is received before the end of the audit period.

19. The method of claim 18, further comprising:

storing the first audit record; and

retrieving the stored first audit record when the second audit record is received.

20. The method of claim 12, wherein the at least one register value in the first and second audit records includes a plurality of register values.

21. The method of claim 12, wherein the at least one register value in the first and second audit records includes an ascending register value.

22. The method of claim 12, wherein the at least one register value in the first and second audit records includes a total piece count register value.
23. The method of claim 12, wherein the first and second digital signatures are verified utilizing a public key.
24. The method of claim 12, wherein one of the first and second digital signatures does not verify, the method further comprises:
- indicating an error in the processing of the usage data.
25. A data center to process usage data comprising:
- means for receiving a first audit record, a second audit record and the usage data, the first audit record including at least one register value at a start of the audit period and a first digital signature, the second audit record including the at least one register value at an end of the audit period and a second digital signature;
 - means for verifying the first and second digital signatures; and
 - if the first and second digital signatures verify, means for reconciling at least a portion of the usage data with the at least one register value included in the audit records.
26. The data center of claim 25, wherein the first and second audit records each include a respective time stamp, and the data center further comprises:
- means for verifying the time stamp in the first audit record corresponds to the start of the audit period; and
 - means for verifying the time stamp in the second audit record corresponds to the end of the audit period.
27. The data center of claim 26, further comprising:
- means for indicating an error in the processing of the usage data if one of the time stamp in the first audit record or the second audit record does not correspond.

28. The data center of claim 25, wherein the means for reconciling at least a portion of the usage data further comprises:

means for determining a difference between the at least one register value included in the second audit record and the at least one register value include in the first audit record; and

means for comparing the difference with a register value included in the usage data.

29. The method of claim 25, wherein the first audit record is received before the end of the audit period, and the data center further comprises:

means for storing the first audit record; and

means for retrieving the stored first audit record when the second audit record is received.

30. The data center of claim 25, wherein the at least one register value in the first and second audit records includes an ascending register value.

31. The data center of claim 25, wherein the at least one register value in the first and second audit records includes a total piece count register value.

32. The data center of claim 25, wherein the first and second digital signatures are verified utilizing a public key.

33. A value dispensing system comprising:

means for generating a first audit record at a start of an audit period, the first audit record including at least one register value at the start of the audit period and a first digital signature;

means for logging the usage data for the audit period; and

means for generating a second audit record at an end of the audit period, the second audit record including the at least one register value at the end of the audit period and a second digital signature.

34. The value dispensing system of claim 33, further comprising:
means for providing the first audit record, the second audit record, and the usage data for the audit period to a data center.
35. The value dispensing system of claim 33, wherein the first audit record and the second audit record further include a time stamp.
36. The value dispensing system of claim 35, wherein the time stamp includes a date and a time.
37. The value dispensing system of claim 33, wherein the at least one register value in the first and second audit records includes a plurality of register values.
38. The value dispensing system of claim 33, wherein the at least one register value in the first and second audit records includes an ascending register value.
39. The value dispensing system of claim 38, wherein the at least one register value in the first and second audit records includes a total piece count register value.
40. The value dispensing system of claim 33, wherein the first and second digital signatures are generated utilizing a private key.
41. The value dispensing system of claim 33, wherein the value dispensing device is a postage meter, and the usage data includes at least one of a total amount of postage dispensed during the audit period, a total count of mail pieces processed during the audit period, a piece count for different classes of mail processed during the audit period, and a piece count for each different postage amount dispensed during the audit period.